

ABC 7 Medical: Lyme Disease

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Anchor:

TONIGHT ABC-7 NEWS BEGINS AN ON-GOING INVESTIGATION INTO LYME DISEASE.

A SILENT WAR IS BEING WAGED IN THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY OVER A POSSIBLE LYME EPIDEMIC. THE CASUALTIES: POSSIBLY TENS OF THOUSANDS OF SUFFERING PATIENTS.

KATHY FOWLER JOINS US WITH THE GREAT LYME DEBATE.

Kathy Fowler:

TWO GROUPS OF DOCTORS ARE PITTED AGAINST EACH OTHER OVER JUST ABOUT EVERY ASPECT OF LYME DISEASE.... FROM THE VERY DEFINITION OF THE ILLNESS TO HOW IT SHOULD BE TREATED.

Story:

REBECCA GRIFFIN COATS HERSELF IN BUG REPELLANT, EVEN IF SHE'S ONLY GOING OUTSIDE HER STERLING VIRGINIA HOME FOR A MOMENT. THE REASON; A TICK BITE SHE SUSPECTS GAVE HER LYME DISEASE. THE ILLNESS LEFT HER MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY INCAPACITATED.

Rebecca Griffin: "the exhaustion was just incredible."

FOR NEARLY A DECADE SHE DIDN'T' EVEN KNOW SHE HAD LYME. SHE SPENT YEARS SEEING SPECIALISTS SEARCHING FOR CURES FOR HER MEMORY LOSS, MENTAL CONFUSION, JOINT PAIN, STRANGE RASHES AND CHRONIC FATIGUE.

Rebecca Griffin: "I had a database of doctors I was seeing and every six weeks something else was whacking out on me."

"hey you"

IT WAS FAMILY physician DR. SARAH FLETCHER WHO FINALLY DIAGNOSED REBECCA WITH LYME DISEASE.

Dr. Sarah Fletcher: "People are just suffering and it's getting mislabeled and misdiagnosed."

DR. FLETCHER AND INTERNIST, DR. NORTON FISHMAN SAY REBECCA'S STORY OF STRANGE SYMPTOMS AND MISDIAGNOSIS IS MUCH TOO

COMMON.

Dr. Norton Fishman: "When they come in and they say I've been to John Hopkins I've been to rheumatologist the endocrinologist, I've been to the neurologist and finally the psychiatrist and they all tell me I'm crazy I say no you've got Lyme disease.. go no further."

THIS IS WHERE THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN. ON ONE SIDE DOCTORS LIKE FLETCHER AND FISHMAN WHO BELIEVE LYME IS AN UNRECOGNIZED EPIDEMIC. THAT IF IT ISN'T DIAGNOSED EARLY AND TREATED PROPERLY IT CAN PROGRESS TO MORE SERIOUS AND DEBILITATING STAGES CALLED "CHRONIC LYME". THAT OFTEN NEEDS TO BE TREATED WITH HIGH-DOSE LONG TERM ANTIBIOTICS.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY, IN FACT, THE MAJORITY, SAYS LYME IS NO EPIDEMIC. THAT CHRONIC LYME DOES NOT EXIST AND THAT LONG TERM ANTIBIOTICS ARE DANGEROUS IF NOT POTENTIALLY FATAL.

Dr. Henry Masur: "There are healthcare providers who are taking advantage of desperate patients and offering them therapies that we know do not work, offering them therapies that we know are harmful."

DR. MASUR SAYS 30 DAYS OF ANTIBIOTICS IS ENOUGH TO KILL THE BACTERIA THAT CAUSES LYME AND THOSE WHO PRESCRIBE LONG TERM ANTIBIOTICS ARE "ROGUE" DOCTORS PRACTICING UNSAFE MEDICINE.

Dr. Henry Masur: "This minority of poorly trained physicians who feel passionate, if they really felt passionately about this they would collect their data so that we could see their data we could see what they base their diagnosis on."

DR. FLETCHER, A BELIEVER OF CHRONIC LYME AGREES SHE IS "PASSIONATE", PARTLY BECAUSE THIS BATTLE IS PERSONAL. SHE LIVES IN A LYME ENDEMIC AREA WAS DIAGNOSED AND DEBILITATED WITH LYME DISEASE 7 YEARS AGO. SHE SAYS LONG-TERM ANTIBIOTICS SAVED HER CAREER, HER LIFE.

Dr. Sarah Fletcher: "There was a 5 year period of time when I was on antibiotics I could think better and then when I came off the antibiotics I couldn't think as well and then when I would go back on the antibiotics my thinking got much better."

WITH NO CONSENSUS AMONG DOCTORS ON THE DISEASE, THE PERVASIVENESS OR EVEN THE TREATMENTS, PATIENTS ARE LEFT IN THE MIDDLE WITH UNANSWERED QUESTIONS.

AFTER 3 YEARS OF ANTIBIOTICS REBECCA SAYS SHE'S GOT HER LIFE

BACK. SHE DOESN'T THINK SHE'LL EVER BE "CURED" BUT SAYS WITH CONTINUED TREATMENT THE DISEASE IS NOW MUCH MORE MANAGEABLE.

"Are you doing better? I think I'm doing better I can hold you... Yeah"

Kathy Fowler:

NEXT DURING OUR ON-GOING INVESTIGATION WE'LL LOOK AT WHY LYME DISEASE "TESTING" CAN BE SO INACCURATE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT "BOTH" SIDES OF THIS GREAT LYME DEBATE LOG ONTO OUR WEBSITE AT WJLA.COM IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A COMMENT ON THIS TOPIC. EMAIL US AT lyme@wjla.com

IDSA's Position: <http://www.idsociety.org/lymedisease.htm>

Chronic Disease: <http://www.ilads.org>

Patient Advocacy: <http://www.lymediseaseassociation.org>

National Capital Lyme Disease Association: <http://natcaplyme.org/>